

UNDERSTANDING  
**READING**  
STRATEGIES

► Making Connections

Talk About It

Do adults always know what is best?

# THE NEST

Short Story by Robert Zacks

Making Connections

Make connections when you read the title of a selection. What types of connections can you make to the title of this short story?

Jimmy was 14. He was listening to his mother tell him, kindly, why she didn't want him to go on a hike. His brown eyes were clouded with sullen rebellion.

"All right, Mom," he said in the controlled voice he had learned from his parents. "If you say I can't go, then I can't, can I?"

Mrs. Swanson said gravely, "You make me sound like a dictator, Jimmy."

"Well, you are, kind of, aren't you?" said Jimmy coldly. "I have to do what you say."

His mother winced a little. She bit her lower lip and considered this.

"It isn't as simple as that," she argued. She smiled a little, however, in pleasure at such evidence of Jimmy's growing power to analyze a situation. "My decisions are made for your own good, Jimmy."

He misunderstood her smile. He thought she was treating him as a child. All his parents seemed to do these days was figure out how to hem him in. "Jimmy, you mustn't—"

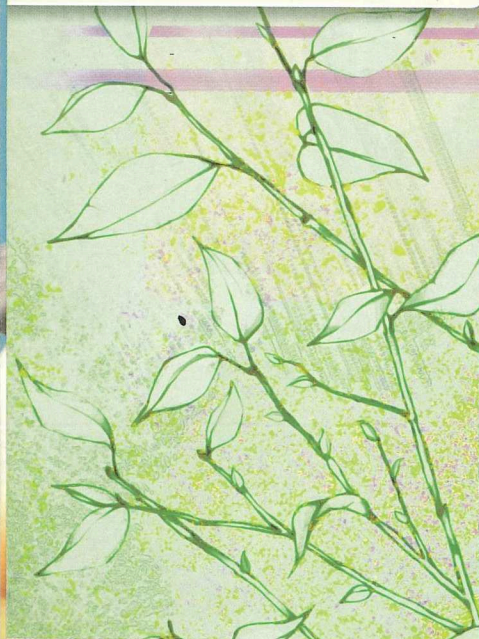
The words, the restrictions, they wrapped around him like tentacles of an octopus, crushing in on his chest so he couldn't seem to breathe.





### Making Connections

Make text-to-self connections. Have you ever had a person in authority make a decision for you? How does thinking about that situation help you to understand how Jimmy feels?



### Making Connections

Make text-to-world connections as you read. What do you think of when you read the word *gang*? How does making this connection help you to understand Jimmy's mother's fear?



He was on his feet, yelling, the controlled, polite speech lost in his bursting anguish for freedom. "Everything is for my own good. Everything! But you aren't telling me the truth. You know why you don't want me to go on the hike? Because of Paul. You just don't like him."

He sucked in his breath, almost sobbing, shocked at himself and yet glad. Mrs. Swanson had an unhappy look. The Swansons were a happy family; but these days a strange restlessness had come into it.

"No," she admitted. "I don't think Paul is good for you. I don't like your associating with him."

Jimmy said, all his heart and soul in his words, "I like Paul. He's my best friend."

"His father drinks," said Mrs. Swanson quietly. "And Paul came out of reform school, didn't he? He stole from a candy store—"

"He's nice!" cried Jimmy, pain in his voice. "And he isn't a thief. He made a mistake. He told me what happened. He was showing off. And now nobody will be friends—"



"But he's formed a gang already, hasn't he? I've heard about it."

"It's just a club, that's all," said Jimmy. "And—and I'm a member. The club is running the hike."

"We won't discuss it further." Mrs. Swanson's voice was suddenly like steel. She stood up. She hesitated, pitying him, and tried to soften it with logic. "Remember, Jimmy, every time we've disagreed, it turned out I knew what I was talking about."

But he didn't listen further. Jimmy turned and blindly ran off the porch across the lawn toward the meeting place at Briggs' Drugstore.



After three blocks he slowed down, panting, his face set with fury. The habit of thinking, encouraged by his parents at every opportunity, began to function.

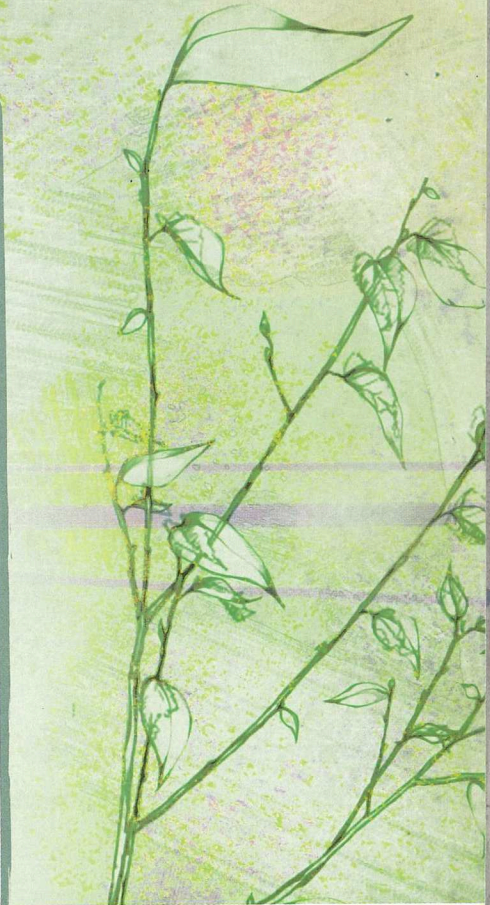
“I know what’s best for you. I know what’s best for you.’ That’s all I ever hear!” muttered Jimmy.

To his reluctant mind sprang memories. The time he insisted he could swim to the raft. Mr. Swanson had curtly said no, he couldn’t risk it. Jimmy had raged, with his father quietly letting him run down. Then his father had told him to go ahead, but that he’d swim next to him.

Jimmy’s throat strangled suddenly at the memory—of the water constricting his windpipe dreadfully, his eyes bulging, his legs and arms numb with exhaustion from the too-long swim. And then the wonderful, strong, blessed arms of his father turning him on his back, pulling him back to shore—

It was confusing. Jimmy shook his head in bewilderment. Suddenly he felt uncertain; the rebellion drained out of him.

Paul was waiting for him at the drugstore with a stillness upon his face as he leaned against the glass front. He was about 14, with sandy hair and bright blue eyes. Jimmy saw, when he came closer, traces of tears on Paul’s cheeks.



### Making Connections

Make connections to your own experiences as you read. We all have second thoughts about decisions we make. Notice how the author’s use of a specific example helps you to connect with Jimmy’s uncertainty.







### Making Connections

Making connections to your own experiences can help you to form opinions about what you read. What do you think about the way that those parents reacted to Paul?



“Well,” said Paul fiercely, “let’s go.”

Jimmy started. “Where’s everybody?”

“They changed their minds,” said Paul, hate in his voice.

The two boys looked at each other, and Jimmy understood. It made fury grow in him, it made him want to hit somebody.

All those parents had stopped the gang from going with Paul because he was once in a reform school.

Paul said, his voice odd, “Maybe you can’t go either?”

Jimmy looked deep into Paul’s eyes. His heart beat fast with friendship and loyalty. “Don’t be a jerk. Come on,” he said cheerfully.

Paul’s face changed. The hate seeped away, leaving sweetness and humbleness. He flung an arm over Jimmy’s shoulder happily.

“Your—your mother doesn’t care if you go, huh?” he said.

Jimmy swallowed. Paul needed this so badly. So very badly. Paul had no mother at all. And his father just didn’t like looking at the world without Paul’s mother, and was always drunk.





"Nah," said Jimmy. "She—she even said I should bring you to supper, afterwards. What shall I tell her, huh?"

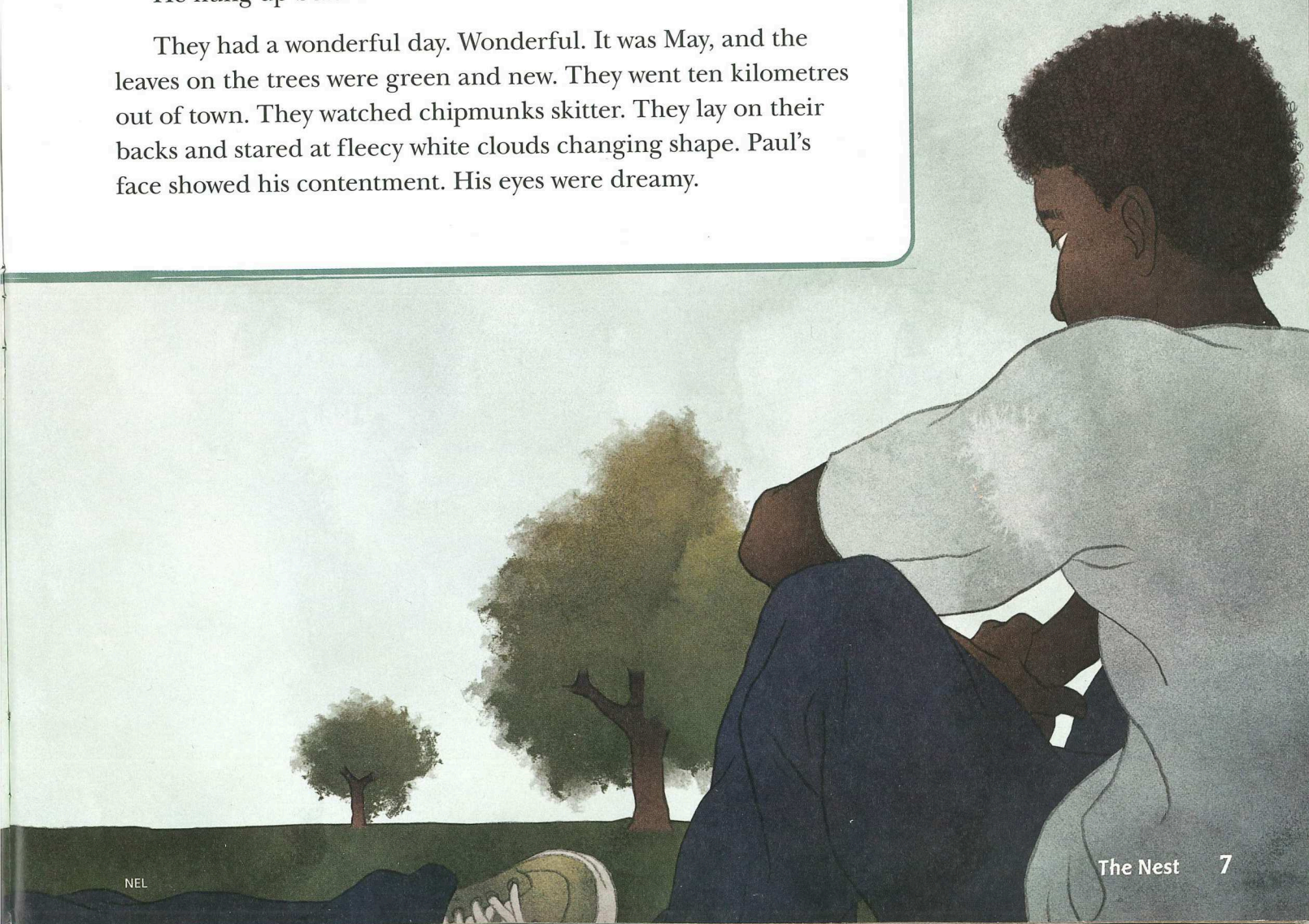
Paul turned ashen, then flushed a deep scarlet. "Sure," he muttered. "Be glad to."

"I got to call her," said Jimmy numbly. "Just a minute."

Jimmy went into the drugstore and called his mother. He told her in a choking voice he was going on the hike, just he and Paul, and he didn't care how mad she got. "Nobody else came," he shouted into the telephone, "because all the mothers—" He was unable to go on for a moment. Then he finished. "I'm bringing him to supper afterwards, Mom. I said you asked him."

He hung up before she could answer.

They had a wonderful day. Wonderful. It was May, and the leaves on the trees were green and new. They went ten kilometres out of town. They watched chipmunks skitter. They lay on their backs and stared at fleecy white clouds changing shape. Paul's face showed his contentment. His eyes were dreamy.







### Making Connections



As you read, make text-to-text connections. How is Paul like other characters you've met in stories or shows? How does making these connections increase your understanding of Paul's character?

But Jimmy, in one cloud, saw the stern face of his mother.

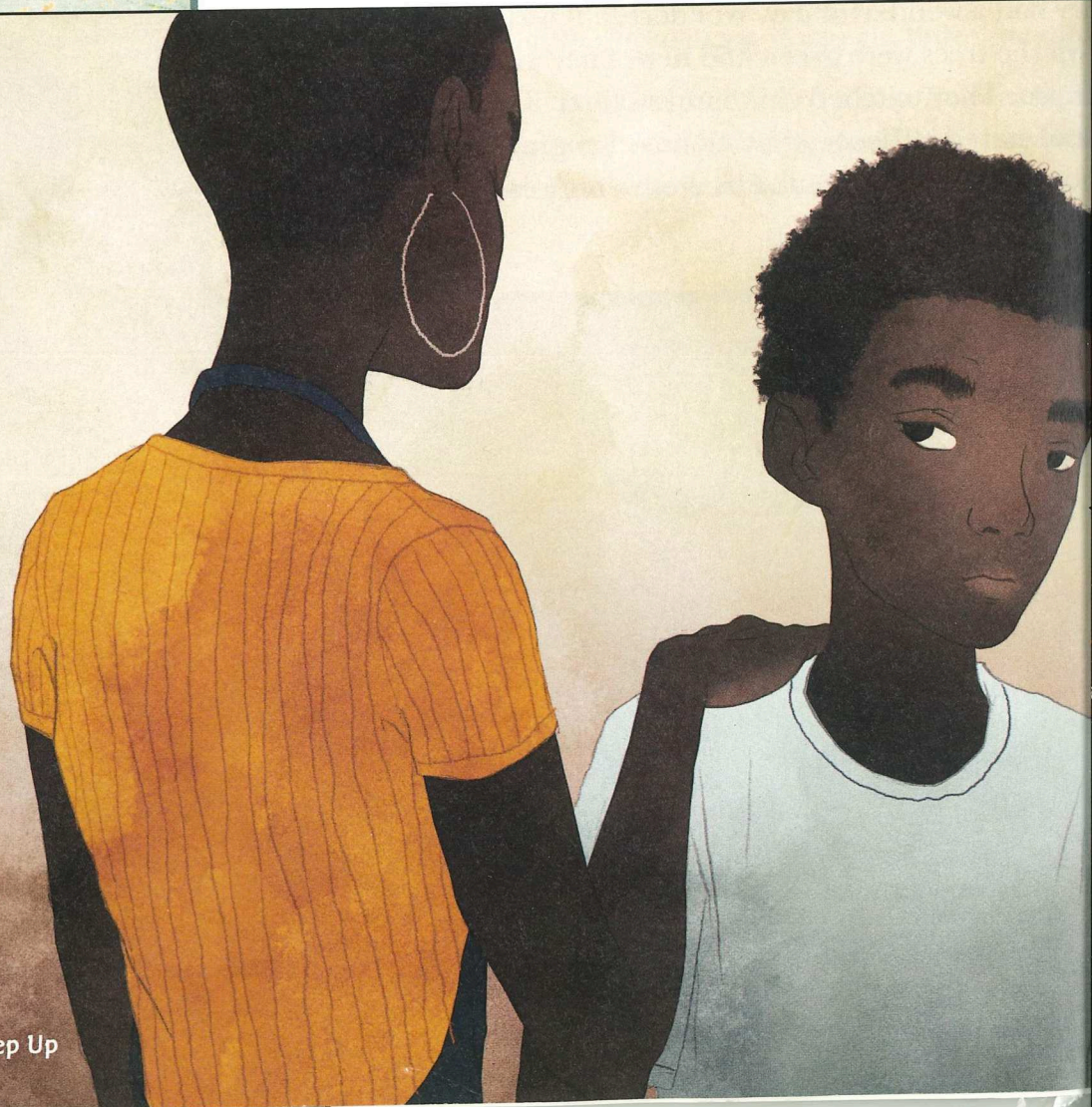
But Mrs. Swanson's face, when she greeted Paul, wasn't stern at all. She looked uncertain as she studied his wistful, shy smile. Jimmy knew, of course, that his parents would wait until later to lecture him. They never made a scene before other people.

Throughout supper, Mr. Swanson was very friendly to the guest. But Jimmy could see that at the same time his father was carefully studying Paul. And Paul, never knowing, thinking he wanted him, had invited him, glowed and showed the side of his personality that Jimmy liked.

After they'd washed the dishes (at Paul's suggestion), Mr. Swanson nodded to Paul. "Come on, Paul," he said. "I'll show you my tool shop."

As Paul eagerly followed him down the basement steps, Mrs. Swanson touched Jimmy's shoulder. Jimmy's heart thudded, but he reluctantly lingered behind. He turned and glared in defiance.

"I don't care," he whispered. "Nobody else came. I could have stayed."





"Jimmy," she said softly, and bent and kissed him. "I'm proud of you, Jimmy. You did the right thing at the right time."

"But you said—" faltered Jimmy. "I mean—"

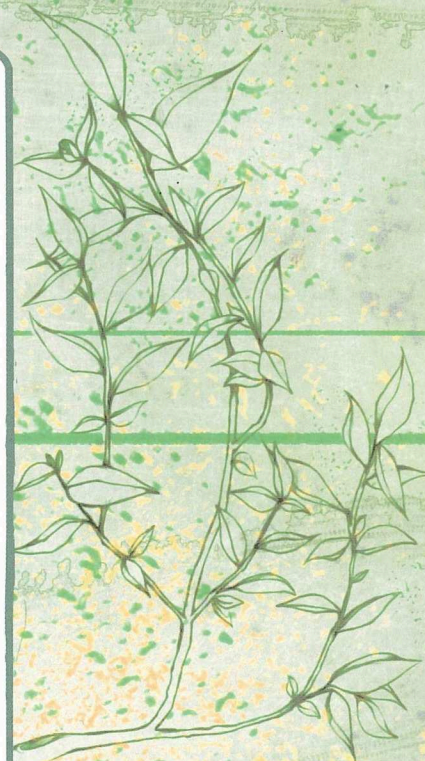
Her eyes were very bright. "I was wrong," she said steadily. "This time I was wrong. You were right. He's a nice boy, I think."

She turned away, patting his cheek as she did so.

At first, joy filled Jimmy. Joy and pride. I'm the one who's right, he thought, dazed. My mother was wrong. Actually wrong. She admitted it.

And then came a frightening sense of loss, as well as of gain. It was like being alone, high up on a cliff where the footing was slippery with moss. Jimmy felt he had to be careful of each step. He had always been sure, even in his anger, of being able to depend on the wisdom of his father and mother. They'd always been right.

But not any more. Now they might be wrong. And Jimmy would have to decide.



## Reflecting

**Metacognition:** How did connecting with the characters in this story help you to better understand the struggle between them?

**Text-to-Self Connections:** Who in the story did you connect most strongly with: Jimmy, his mother, or Paul? Explain why.

**Critical Literacy:** How would this story change if it were told from the mother's point of view?

## Making Connections

A graphic organizer like this can help you organize the connections you made as you read this story.

*Would I stand up for a friend?*

connections to the story

*What novels does this story remind me of?*

*What news items does this story remind me of?*